

Canadian Political Anecdotes for the winter blahs

The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes

Jack McLeod and Cynthia M. Smith, editors
Oxford University Press, 273 pp

review by Wendy Joy

Did Richard Hatfield (New Brunswick's Conservative Premier from 1970 to 1987) really cook his cat? You can find out in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes*, a book sure to appeal to lovers of gossip, history, and politics.

The editors, Jack McLeod (a professor of political science at the University of Toronto) and Cynthia M. Smith (Chief of

"Mr. Speaker! Will you please bang that thing of yours on the table!"

the Legislative Research Service, Ontario Legislative Library) raided a large number of biographies, books on Canadian politics, and magazine and newspaper articles for the anecdotes. Beginning chronologically with Samuel de Champlain and ending with Brian Mulroney, almost every major figure and topic in Canadian political history is covered. The majority of the anecdotes are worthwhile, with selections ranging from bizarre to obscure to truly hilarious. This is an ideal browsing book; if one segment is boring you can just skip around until you find something you like.

The book isn't meant to teach a history lesson, but many of the early entries still

brought shame to my historically ignorant heart. At least I'm not alone; how many Canadians (history majors don't count) know who Sir John J. Abbott and Sir John S. Thompson were? Nobody I asked found their names even vaguely familiar. (They were the third and fourth Prime Ministers of Canada, respectively.)

My favourite entries were the later ones about modern-day politicians, although in some cases the stories about them aren't as revealing as earlier anecdotes about politicians long dead. Not surprisingly, politicians seem reluctant to reveal anything about peers they may later be strange bed-fellows with. Brian Mulroney does not fare well: the majority of anecdotes about him are from politicians like Jean Chretien who believe he sold out Canada to the United States. One quote from Mulroney himself rather typifies his political career: "I am not denying anything I did not say."

Also revealing are anecdotes about retired political animals like Pierre Trudeau, whom nobody in politics really seems to like. He is definitely not a generous man: although a millionaire, Trudeau's Christmas gifts to his staff were usually unwanted foreign embassy presents from Ottawa. He could also be rude and obnoxious. One anecdote claims that in 1971 Trudeau told two heckling Conservative MP's to "fuck off," carefully mouthing the words so they would not appear on the House of Commons record. Trudeau later claimed to have said "fuddle-duddle."

There are some disappointing exclusions. There are no anecdotes about Don Getty; from a purely Western point of view, I thought there must be at least *one* inter-


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Edited by Jack McLeod



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